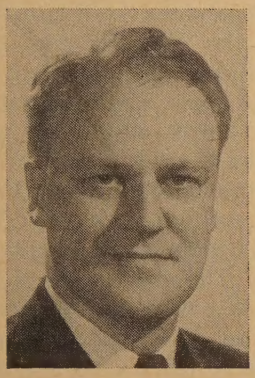
The Pulpit

A Journal of Contemporary Preaching



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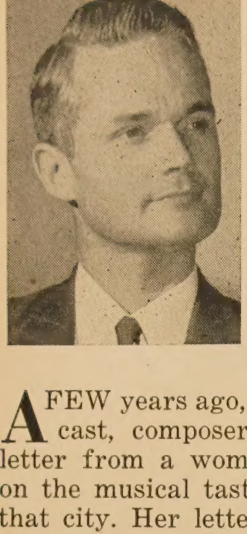

By Joseph M. Hopkins

THE SNARE O

A FEW years ago, during an intermission broadcast, composer-critic Deems Taylor read a letter from a woman in Baltimore commenting on the musical tastes among symphony-goers in that city. Her letter listed a few composers she believed to be acceptable to discriminating Baltimore audiences, then added, "Of course, Tschaikowsky is definitely out." No explanation necessary; a foregone conclusion.

I was reminded of an experience one summer at Chautauqua, New York. A fellow-dishwasher at the Cow Bell Tea Room, an Oberlin student and an accomplished violinist, asked me once who was my favorite composer. When I replied "Tschaikowsky," he said scornfully, "Oh, you'll grow out of that stage!"

Too Commonplace

Well, what's wrong with Tschaikowsky? Nothing, except that he made the mistake of writing some very tuneful melodies which have been exploited *ad nauseum* by the purveyors of popular music. In the minds of many, Tschaikowsky's music has become commonplace and therefore must be considered vulgar. Accordingly, Tschaikowsky as a composer is *persona non grata* in some sophisticated musical circles.

Was it not for this very reason that Jesus was spurned by the religious elite of his day? He consorted with publicans and sinners; he was referred to derisively as "the Nazarene," "the carpenter's son."

When the Israelites first received manna in the wilderness, they were overjoyed and grateful. But after 40 years of nothing but manna to eat, the people literally became fed up with it. Instead of appreciating this miracle food which was keeping them from starving, they came to loathe it and demanded a change in the menu.

I wonder if this is not what has happened many of us with respect to the Bread of Heave the spiritual manna which God has provided f the sustenance of our souls? I read just recent that the American Bible Society alone has d tributed over 450,000,000 volumes of the Scri ture during its 138-year history. Freedom of wo ship is an accepted American tradition; church abound everywhere; the Bible, if not often rea at least is to be found in nearly every home though in many cases only after diligent searc This food of the spirit is so abundant and easi available that many have no hunger for it.

Did you ever wonder, when driving through t country, why so many farmers block off a love view by building their barn right across the roa in front of the house? The city dweller, for who a rolling countryside is a rare and beautiful sigh is often more likely to prize the loveliness of rural landscape than is the farmer who sees every day. The tendency is for us to take th familiar for granted.

Undoubtedly the snare of the familiar explain why we so rarely think to give thanks for th things of every day: parents, friends, children education, freedom, America, rain, sunshin These blessings are commonplace. In many in stances we haven't had to sacrifice for them. S we fail to appreciate them as we should.

Frequent Temptations

Therein lies a subtle nger of 20th-centur Christianity. In our gene ation we have becom calloused to the gospel. We are like the beate path which the seed of the sower was unable t penetrate. Hence we are susceptible to the temp tation either 1) to *ignore* the gospel or 2) to re duce it to *meaningless ritual.*

It was the first of these tendencies which J. B Phillips had in mind when he translated Paul' letters and the Gospels into modern English. Dr Phillips was once an atheist. A graduate of Cam bridge, he later became an Anglican vicar an now is rector of a large Surrey parish. A recen article in *Presbyterian Life* explains that Dr Phillips' chief concern is getting the gospel acros to the man in the street. To do this the 48-yea old vicar says it is necessary to find "words shape cunningly to pass men's defenses and explod silently and effectually within their minds. Thi means, in practice, turning a face of flint toward

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JOSEPH M. HOPKINS is associate professor in the department of Bible and philosophy at Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, from which he received the B.Mus. degree in 1940. This undergraduate interest and training is reflected in the fact that Dr. Hopkins—he earned the Ph.D. degree from the University of Pittsburgh last year—refers to music writing as his hobby and has had more than 30 compositions published. He is also a frequent contributor to religious and educational journals. Following graduation from Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological seminary and his ordination in the United Presbyterian Church, he served for two years as a U.S. Navy chaplain.

FAMILIARITY

e easy cliche, the well-worn religious cant and raseology, dear no doubt to the faithful, but erly meaningless to those outside the fold."

The "good news" is no longer news. That's why fails to capture the attention of modern Ameri- ns. To explain the atonement in traditional angelistic terminology is to invite the follow- g reactions: 1) "Always the same old thing!" "So what?" 3) "He sounds like one of those ligious fanatics!" To tell people these days that sus died for their sins is to invite the contempt ich greets the familiar.

Verbal Confusion

Does this mean that we should stop telling em? By no means! We still are under obligation the Great Commission, and should feel as Paul, Voe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Yet e not many watering down their gospel either avoid the stigma of fundamentalism or because ey realize that such terms as "sin," "grace," lood," "saved" and "born again" fail to regis- r in the minds of the uninitiated? In avoiding e familiar terminology, however, they do not bstitute an adequate vocabulary by which these eat spiritual truths may be conveyed to the odern, secular mind. In striving to eliminate readbare words and phrases, they often leave eir hearers in a mist of verbal confusion. To scard essential doctrines because of the trite hraseology by which they are commonly ex- ressed is to commit the usual carelessness— rowing the baby out with the bath.

This leads us to the second snare of familiarity -that of "vain repetition." To many of funda- entalist bent, the glib cliche has become a shib- oleth of orthodoxy. It was that peril to which esus had reference when he warned that not all ose who say "Lord, Lord" will gain entrance to e Kingdom of Heaven. He was referring to e Pharisees, for whom ritual and conformity ad become ends in themselves instead of means o the end of true worship.

Not long ago a student came to me in great istress. She and a friend had kept a careful tally f the number of times a visiting preacher had poken the name of Jesus Christ in a series of sermons. They concluded that because this hall-mark of orthodoxy had not been pronounced every few sentences, the preacher in question was a "modernist." That they kept a running record of the speaker's use of certain words and phrases betrays the fact that these young ladies had come to the services not to worship but to judge. If the preacher had punctuated his pulpit deliverances with the "right" words and phrases, they would have gloated that he was "fundamental." But because he did not indulge in stereotyped language and delivery, he was branded as liberal and accused of "not preaching salvation."

A number of ministers refuse to submit to the pressure exercised by the "salvationists" to conform to the pattern of reciting the old hackneyed phrases with fervent sing-song intonations. But too many of these modern apostles of Jesus, leaning over backwards to avoid catering to a pharisaical minority, swing to the dangerous extreme of soft-pedaling the fundamental doctrines of the faith. In studiously detouring the well-worn highway of unctuous utterances, they fail to "preach Christ and him crucified." In contrast to the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they use the spirit of the law as an excuse for neglecting its letter! As a consequence, often both letter and spirit are lost.

Interpretation Essential

In musical composition certain fundamental tones, harmonies and cadences cannot, or should not, be avoided. When they are, the result is the cacophony which is characteristic of much modern music. So in Christianity there are some essential terms and doctrines which are irreplaceable. Christian theology cannot very well get along without sin, repentance, justice, mercy, Christ. It is not necessary to *omit* such words from our preaching and witnessing. But it *is* necessary to *interpret* them. The urgent task of the modern pulpit is to interpret the basic truths of Christianity to the 20th-century mind, while retaining their historic significance; to present Christ in a fresh, direct and compelling manner—to the end that both the "saved" and the "unsaved" may be delivered from the snare of familiarity.

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'The Trouble We're In'

ANDRE Gide in his lovely short story "Pastoral Symphony" tells of a young girl, Gertrude, who had been blind from birth. Her blindness really protected her, so that she had a childlike, sentimental picture of the people around her, which neither her friends nor her family tried to upset. Then one day an operation was performed so that she could see. Two things immediately struck her with crushing meaning. One was that nature was more beautiful than she in her blindness had ever dreamed it would be: if we only knew it, light and color are fantastically beautiful. The other thing was that the faces of men were sadder than she had ever imagined they would be: every one of them lined with care, anxiety, inner restlessness. She almost wished her eyes had never been opened.

My sermon today is really on that sad side of men's faces. If you walk through life with open eyes you will be struck time and again by the evil in the world, the sin. Sometimes we try to wriggle out of it, say it isn't so. If we use the word "sin" we like to whisper it or make it harmless. A midwestern college once advertised to the parents of its students that its campus was located "seven miles from any known form of sin." It is just that easy to make sin out there, a comfortable distance away, until your eyes are opened and you look at the faces of men right at home, your own face, and know that there's something wrong in you.

A Sense of Sin

Our age has been a bit more honest than others about this. We really take sin more seriously than many of us did twenty years ago. We are willing to admit that modern man has a very sad, confused face. Archbishop Temple says: "The alienation of man from God is a fact . . . It's our business not to deny it." But after all, we say, he is only a preacher and preachers are paid to talk about sin. However, the strange thing is that the preachers do less talking about sin these days than do other people. A poet, W. H. Auden, tells us, "This is an age that has known the distance of God more than any other." That is really the orthodox definition of sin: distance from God. Robert Oppenheimer watches the first atomic explosion and frank admits, "I had something like a sense of sin as watched it . . ." T. S. Eliot writes plays like *T Cocktail Party* and everyone sits around watchi Sir Harcourt-Reilly, a psychiatrist, wrestle wi the problem of sin. Or there's Harvard Universit after one of President Pusey's first speeches, o journal came out with the headline, "Harva Recovers a Sense of Sin." We might as well fa it: there's something about modern life that mak most of us, if we are sensitive at all, take serious this business of the evil in the world. We may n like what we see, we may wish we were blind, b once our eyes are opened we must admit mode man has a good deal of sadness in his face.

The New Testament has always said that t gospel has something to do with the evil in t world. Others, no doubt, will draw our attenti to the brighter side, to the rescuing love of Go but Christianity has always said that we can nev understand the rescue of God until we understa our need of rescue. You don't throw a life line a man who never calls for help; he wouldn't gra it. So the gospel always has two sides, much suggested in the familiar hymn:

> Upon that cross of Jesus
> Mine eye at times can see
> The very dying form of
> One who suffered there for me;
> And from my stricken heart with tears
> Two wonders I confess:
> The wonders of redeeming love
> And my unworthiness.

Yes, there are two wonders to the gospel: th mystery of good and the mystery of evil, th wonder of redeeming love and my unworthines Today we ask, "What about the latter? What sin, my unworthiness?"

The Great Betrayal

We might start right off with the simple stat ment that, according to the gospel, every man ha a sense of having lost God, some way or othe The Bible is not abstract about it, just descriptiv It says: "All have sinned." I don't mean by si what the world usually calls sin, some infractio of the moral law. That would be nice; then yo could plan to get seven miles away from the nea est source of sin and feel quite smug about i "We're not sinners like other men." No, when th gospel talks about sin it is on a deeper level tha that. It asserts that deep down we have prove irresponsible and false to the love of God, betraye our Creator, distrusted the Reality behind a reality and gone our own way as if there were n God. I remember a girl telling me about her broke

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HARRY H. KRUENER next month will take over his new duties as dean of the chapel at Denison University after seven years in Granville, Ohio, as pastor of the First Baptist Church and visiting lecturer in religion at the university. He preached this sermon before the American Baptist Convention in May. A graduate of Haverford College, Andover-Newton Theological School and Boston University School of Theology, Dean Kruener last year was Dr. Ralph Sockman's substitute for ten weeks on the National Radio Pulpit hour.

ve affair. She said: "It's not what he did; it's at he never once thought of me." This is the sin hind sins: not what we do, but our basic treason the divine love, so that God can say of each of s, "He never even once thought of me." And hristianity says that in some way or other every ne of us has made that Great Betrayal. We have st God. We have put ourselves at the center.

To many people this seems a very pessimistic icture of human nature, and perhaps it is. Compared with many modern theories of man, Christianity always will seem pessimistic and deeply agic. Most modern theories of man are frankly uite shallow to the Christian.

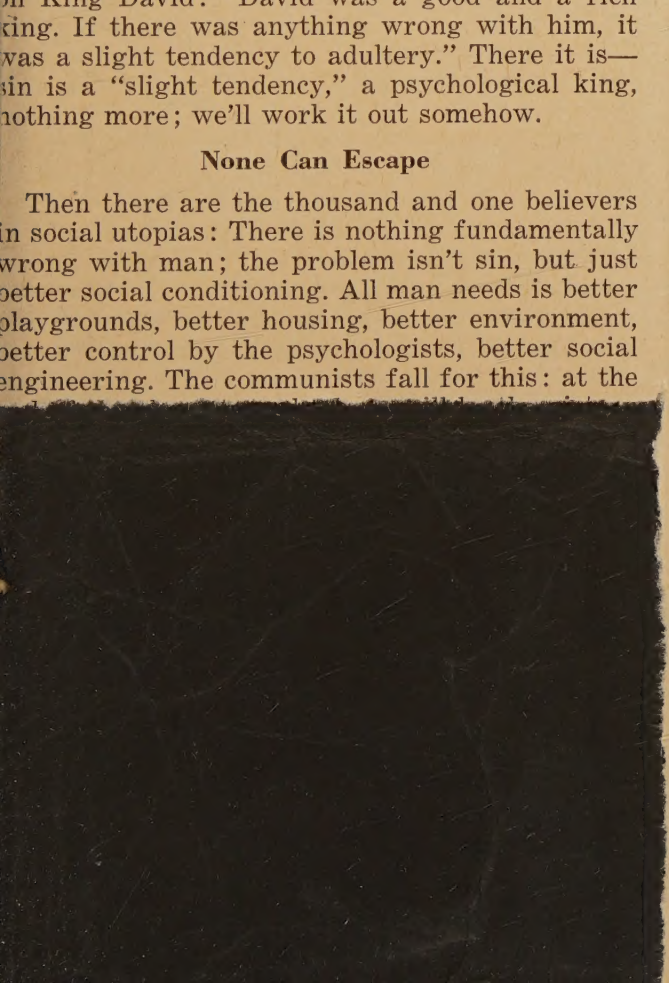
There is the glorified-ape theory: Man is a omplex and interesting ape, teetering on his hind gs. There is a lot you can say for an ape; he eems to be able to put two and two together ather well. But there is no sense talking about he sin of an ape, even if he is a glorified and omplicated one. Man as ape has no sins to be aken away so far as we know.

And there's the escalator theory of man: Man s progressing onward and upward forever. Surely ve're better than the cave man; after all, we have niversal education. Don't worry about your sins; ust step on the escalator of evolutionary progress; ou're bound to rise. No sin in that picture.

And then there's the divine-spark theory: After ll, man is not far from God; he has the divine park within him. All you need to do is get the ellows out and blow up the spark. Basically we re not sinners but just slightly undeveloped aints. It is like the little boy who wrote an essay n King David: "David was a good and a rich ing. If there was anything wrong with him, it as a slight tendency to adultery." There it is—in is a "slight tendency," a psychological king, nothing more; we'll work it out somehow.

None Can Escape

Then there are the thousand and one believers in social utopias: There is nothing fundamentally wrong with man; the problem isn't sin, but just better social conditioning. All man needs is better playgrounds, better housing, better environment, better control by the psychologists, better social engineering. The communists fall for this: at the



of us has a sense of having lost God. But Christianity goes on to say a second thing, that this sense of being lost comes to each of us in different ways. This inner distance from God takes many forms which we should recognize in ourselves. This is what Jesus talked about. He did not argue about the lostness of man; he described men who were lost. He told stories, and people hearing these stories said: "That's right, that's just the way I feel before God; he speaks to my condition, my own human situation." So Jesus said some men are lost like sheep, some men are lost like coins, some men are lost like the prodigal son, some men are lost like the elder brother who stayed at home and did not even know he was lost. One of these will speak of your condition, will describe your sin —or all of them might—says Jesus.

Sickness of Our Times

You are lost like a sheep. Deep down you are aimless without God. Oh, you are healthy enough; you may even think you are very tough-minded and practical—all sinners think they are practical. But really, all you do from day to day is nibble the grass one foot in front of your nose, take life as it comes along. If the grass is green you are happy; if it is brown you bleat at the nature of the universe. But underneath you are aimless, you are lost like a sheep.

This ought not be hard for any of us to understand. The first symptom of sin is boredom. The first sign of being distant from God is purposelessness, meaninglessness. And this is a sickness we in the 20th century are familiar with. We live and die in the "quiet desperation" of a meaningless routine. Rollo May tells of a New York bus driver who all his working life had taken the same bus route, down the avenue, crosstown, down the avenue, back crosstown into the garage. One day he could stand it no longer. On his first trip he went down the avenue and kept going; he drove the bus all the way to Florida before he was caught. And the strange thing is that when he was brought back for trial, all the city rose to his defense. You see, there was a whole city revolting against the meaninglessness of its own daily routine, the 20th century sickness, boredom. And if you think this is confined to older people, I shall remind you that the highest cause of death among college students is automobile accidents, attesting a strange, demonic urge just to keep moving, and moving fast, even if it is to suicide. "Don't stop to think. The bottom might really drop out of things. Better to end with a bang than a whimper." We all know something of this first symptom of sin, to be aimless, to be lost like a sheep.

Endless Predicament

Again, you may be lost like a coin, says Jesus—a coin that has rolled under the carpet and can't be found. Some of us are lost because we are the victim of circumstances, the sin and carelessness of others, the sinful environment, if you please. Sin is not only an individual problem; it is a total predicament, a web in which we are caught. You

can't help noticing this about the cross of Calvary. No one person was to blame for it. There were no completely bad men involved in the tragedy of the cross. Legally, Pilate can be blamed; he was the governor. But after all, he was just carrying out Roman law and justice, and doing it efficiently. The high priest can be blamed, but he had a religious institution to defend. When he said, "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish," it made sense; we cannot blame him. The mob can be blamed, the disciples can be blamed, the Pharisees can be blamed; but for none is there an open-and-shut case. The tragedy of the cross, like many of our tragedies, is not one man's mistake. It is the total human situation, the endless predicament of our self-will and self-worship taking the place of God. It is what Paul called "this body of death." It is the system around which you have organized your life and society has organized its life—a system in which God does not figure. And as we all participate in the system we all know something of this deeper meaning of sin. There is a sinful world around us, and in that sinful world, says Jesus, some of us are lost like a coin, tossed under the carpet by the habitual or deliberate carelessness of others.

The Worst Symptom

And some of us are lost like the prodigal son. What was his sin? That he went and had a good time in a far country, wasting his substance in riotous living? Not particularly. His sin was not in his immoralities; his sin was his disloyalty to his father who loved him. It was not in his crimes, but in his treason. Crime is the breaking of law, but at least you know and believe in law; there is hardly a criminal who wants to do away with law as such. But treason is disloyalty to law itself; it is a far blacker evil than crime. Whitaker Chambers was criminal; he broke many decent moral laws. Alger Hiss did not break any; he was a law-abiding and moral man: but so far as we know at present, he committed treason. And Christianity has always thought of sin not so much in terms of the act as in terms of the disloyalty involved. The prodigal was lost because he was disloyal.

And some of us, says Jesus, are lost like the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son. He never left home, he thought he was pretty good, he was self-satisfied and self-sufficient. He never even felt lost in life. Here's where some of us belong at times. Ours is the sin of the elder brother; our virtues keep us from God as much as our vices. And notice, as Jesus told the stories, the elder brother was the only person who was never found. The shepherd found the sheep, the woman found the coin, the father embraced the prodigal son in the dust of the road, but the self-righteous elder brother, through it all, stayed the same as he was. The only one who was never found by God was the only one who never admitted he was lost. The worst symptom of sin is always self-satisfaction.

Let me summarize. The Christian gospel ha something to do with the evil in the world; it ha something to do with sin. There is a dark side t human nature. Christianity says quite simply tha deep down every man has a sense of having los God and that every theory of human nature i shallow until it takes this into account. Christ anity says that this sense of being lost has differ ent symptoms: you may be aimless like a sheep you may be lost like a coin, the victim of the sin of others; you may be disloyal like the prodigal you may be self-satisfied and never know you ar lost and thereby be more lost than ever. This i the honesty of Christianity: "All have sinned an fall short of the glory of God." "God be mercifu to me a sinner!"

The Other Side

But strangely enough, having faced it, you ca never stop with this dark side. It is not the whol picture. Christianity always goes on to say that n man is completely lost to God. Man is the sinfu child of God, but he is still the child of God. Th image of the divine in him may be broken; it i never destroyed. And just when you despair, th most sinful of men surprise you with a patheti longing for the good, a reaching for the eternal Recently hardened prisoners rioted in the stat prison in Massachusetts. It was not over the food or the discipline; it was something stranger and more moving. Ted Green's eyes, we read, fille with tears as he tried to explain to the news papers: "I've done a lot of bad things, evil things in my life. My only wish is that sometime I migh do a good thing, like giving my eyes so that a blind child might see, or my body so that men could understand disease better. The trouble is, isn' there some way that I could do something good before I die?"

That is the other side. With all our sins, the image of God does not rub out very easily. In the darkest heart there is always the longing to "do something good before I die." The gospel not only reveals the evil in our hearts; it also speaks to that longing. We confess two wonders: the wonder of our unworthiness—but that is only half of it—and the other half, the amazing wonder of redeeming love.

The Silences of God

By Graham W. Hardy

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10.

DONALD Francis Tovey used often to say to his students at Edinburg that in music the rests are just as important as the notes. At first this seems a gross exaggeration; but any musician soon learns that without careful attention to pauses—to the intervals however brief between musical phrases—the music will lose half its beauty. So in the wider sphere of life, silence plays a vital part and can often speak far more than words. Think of the silence of awe before some work of art or a miracle of natural beauty, the silence that expresses deep sympathy, the intimate communion of two souls in love, or the pained silence that condemns and convicts. In moments like these speech is as unnecessary as it is artificial. Carlyle wrote with great wisdom: "Under all speech that is good for anything there lies a silence that is better. Silence is deep as Eternity, speech is shallow as Time." "He is silent," it is said of one of Thomas Hardy's characters in *Under the Greenwood Tree,* "He can keep silent well. That man's silence is wonderful to listen to."

Neglected Experience

The testimony of real religion declares that there is also a silence of God that is wonderful to listen to. Here is an aspect of religious experience that has been strangely neglected. Rightly the emphasis has always been on the Words of God. "In the beginning was the Word." Let us never forget that our Christian faith is built not upon the flimsy foundation of airy philosophizing but upon the solid facts of God's action in Christ: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

We cling in faith not to a chimera but to a cross that is rooted in history. We remember Christ who shared the blackest depths of despair and suffering, crying out against the apparent silence of heaven: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We behold a resurrected Christ whose defeat of the worst powers of sin and death released the power that created his church, the living Word of God who has spoken forth in face of every assault of evil down all the ages.

But there are occasions when the human soul faces the apparent silence of God; when, as far as man's understanding can go, there seems no direct answer to his cry. Anxious questions arise: "Has God heard my prayer? Has God lost control over the world he has made?" Let us consider God's silences.

Silence That Tests

First, there is the silence that *tests.* The church has never had to endure more drastic and bitter persecution than in the first years of her life. Under the Emperors Nero and Domitian the might of the Roman Empire was concentrated in a ruthless attempt to exterminate that despised little sect of believers which constituted the Christian church. Jesus had declared that his church was built upon a rock and the gates of hell would not prevail against it, but now it seemed even to the most courageous souls that the gates of hell were letting in an unbridled fury that would bring utter destruction. John in his vision seems to hear the very souls of the martyred crying out against a God who could permit these horrors. "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?' "

We can understand that cry, for it is an echo of the questioning of the human heart when prayer seems unanswered, when often with pleadings and tears men have sought some voice from God and there seems nothing but silence. A great question mark looms across their faith. In such a mood the psalmist cries to God:

> To Thee, O Lord, I call;
> my rock, be not deaf to me,
> lest, if thou be silent to me,
> I become like those who go down to the Pit.

Today we look out on the world, at the depressing muddle in international relations, at the places of volcanic unrest ready almost to burst forth into conflagration, and we are tempted to ask if ever God's Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. We look at the more intimate experiences of life, the difficulties, the temptations and disappointments that often dog our path; we remember those experiences when faith seemed strained almost to breaking point. Who has not known the silence of God?

GRAHAM W. HARDY, a minister of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), serves an Edinburgh parish. He received the S.T.M. degree from Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1947 and holds degrees from Edinburgh University and New College.

In answer, one fundamental presupposition of faith cannot be too strongly emphasized. The silence of God must never be interpreted as a sign that he has ceased to care. Can anyone who has grasped anything of the meaning of the incarnation, can anyone who has stood in spirit at the foot of the cross, imagine that the God who bears our griefs and carries our sorrows can look on dispassionately while war and suffering and innumerable human tragedies wreak havoc on the world he died to save? In all reverence we must say that the heart of God is well nigh broken.

But there is a silence that tests; things which in his inscrutable wisdom and purpose God allows. Often he seeks to test the depth and quality of faith, as he did with Abraham on Mount Moriah. What worth is a fair-weather religion that only flourishes when all goes well? Every airplane manufacturer knows that his machine must be submitted to hard and searching tests before it can be put into active service. Every botanist knows that trees strike deep roots only because they have to withstand the blast of winter winds. So the deepest roots of faith are struck in the hours of hard and painful testing. Job cried out in the agony of suffering:

> "Behold, he will slay me; I have no hope;
> yet I will defend my ways to his face."

When life brings sorrows "too deep for tears," when we pray in the darkness of despair and there seems no answering voice, may we have Job's faith, "believing where we cannot prove."

Silence That Convicts

There is also a silence that *convicts*. It is a fact of human experience to be shamed far more by silence than by a torrent of anger. Wordsworth, in his autobiographical poem, "The Prelude," tells of a childhood adventure. Walking alone by a lakeside, he saw a boat; unobserved, he stealthily crept into it and rowed forth on the silent waters. He tells how he seemed to hear the very hills crying out against him. In the solemn silence of the dusk, they convicted him of his theft.

A modern prodigal, who had left home and made a sorry mess of life, came back one night to his father to make a clean breast of it all. The parent, whose face bore the marks of suffering his boy had inflicted, listened in silence. The lad blurted out his tragic tale, wishing that his father would strike him and punish him. But still never a word. He dared not meet his father's eyes for shame and sorrow. At length the old man with drawn face looked kindly on his lad, and firmly clasped the boy's hand in his, still without a word. Yet more than any words, that silence convicted him of his folly and transformed his life.

One day the Pharisees brought to our Lord a woman of disgraceful reputation, accusing her with their self-righteous pride. But Jesus did not answer. He wrote on the ground, and spoke at length: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." Again silence. Far more than any stern rebuke that silence convicted the Pharisees of their hypocrisy and th poor woman of her sin.

Have we known the silence of God that co victs? If a congregation were, as one man, to cr out with clenched fists in defiance to heaven, "I there be a God, let him strike us down this ver hour," the minutes would slowly pass and nothin would happen. But in that silence every hea would know the rebuke of heaven. So when w have repeatedly, though less openly, acted i defiance of God's will, when with full knowledg we have allowed something dishonest to enter ou lives, or given way to some secret sin, we find n sudden token of wrath from heaven—only silence When we have betrayed the Master whom w serve or missed opportunities to comfort o strengthen another's faltering faith, again w hear no rebuke from God—only silence. But i that very silence we are convicted. We know w have added to the sorrows of Christ and betraye the trust he had in us. Then may we behold agai his cross and bow before its message.

Silence Calls Us

We have considered the silences of God tha test and convict, and we now turn to the silenc that *calls*. This silence is wonderful to listen to Through this medium God speaks most directly and searchingly to human heart. The psalmis wrote words of deeper import than may first ap pear when he echoed the divine message: "Be still and know that I am God." Paradoxically it may be that only in and through silence can we hear the Word that He forever seeks to impart to us

Have we taken a walk in the country after a day of bustle and activity, with our mind full of a thousand distracting thoughts? Perhaps we were too preoccupied with ourselves to absorb the beauty of the natural world around. Then we sat awhile or lay back in the long grass. Gradually we became aware of a whole world of sights and sounds: the larks singing, the whisper of the wind in the trees, the friendly murmur of insects. Our eyes opened to the indescribable delicacy of nature's colorings and the soft changing beauty of the clouds. We wondered how we could have missed all this. How blind and deaf we were!

Might not our greatest need be, amid the bewilderment and confusion of our lives, to return to the eternal simplicities that can only be heard in the silence? To still our souls. To take time religiously each day when we shut out the world that is seen and temporal and have communion with the world that is unseen and eternal, a world that is yet all round us and nearer than ever we have known or dared to hope. To listen to the voice of the living Christ calling in the silence. To be still and know our Lord and Master, confronting our lives, showing us his hands and his feet, giving us the pardon, the cleansing and the power we sorely need, and sending us back to life with new vision and hope, with the background of eternity and a sense of purpose to inspire and lift our hearts. Will you resolve each day to be still and in the silence of God to know your Lord?

Sinners and the Sacrament

By G. B. Johnston

St. Paul's United Church, Grande Prairie, Alberta

HAVE you ever taken a close look at those who were sitting around the table of the Lord that night in the Upper Room? They are worth examining, for they give us an insight into the kind of people the Lord expects to see at the communion table.

There was Peter, who reverenced his Lord so much that he first refused to have Jesus wash his feet, yet later was found in the courtyard of the high priest denying that he had anything to do with the Galilean.

There was Thomas, who quietly accepted the bread and wine, and yet cherished within his heart doubt and bewilderment.

There was Judas, who just a few days before the feast had willfully gone to the chief priests of Israel, had contracted with them to deliver Jesus into their hands, and had even accepted money from them as a symbol of his faithfulness in keeping the bargain.

See the other disciples dissenting from one another, flaring up in anger over who would be accounted greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, because they all wanted to share in the glory of the new realm which they believed Jesus would create.

Sinners, Not Saints

No, they were not saints who sat around that table of the Lord; they were all sinners—except One. And as he handed to them the elements of bread and wine, his prayer was that they might receive also the strength to become the sons of God.

Perhaps there are still many who wonder why they are here at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We wonder if eating the bread and drinking the wine will really make any difference to our lives—if it should make a difference. We wonder if we are worthy to meet here and share these tokens of Christ's love for us. Has anyone ever been worthy of these sacred symbols? Has anyone ever been made perfect through participation in the Lord's Supper?

I imagine that at that first love feast those men must also have questioned themselves. I suspect that Judas must have wondered whether he ought to eat that wine-dipped piece of bread. I imagine that Peter must have trembled when the Lord said to him, "This is my body which is broken for you." I would think that a thousand thoughts would flood into the head of Thomas, and make him wonder about eating the bread, and drinking the wine.

Even years later, when the sacrament was commonly observed in the church, I imagine that the apostles would still be concerned over the fact of their unworthiness. Even Paul, to whom Christ appeared, and instituted the sacrament — even Paul must have thought about the part he played in murdering Stephen—and the scores of nameless Christians who fell to his sword, and he must have shuddered at the thought of accepting these tokens of Christ's perfect life and love.

Nourishment for the Weak

But the sacrament is for sinners. The bread and wine are specially set aside for the nourishment of the spiritually weak. Filled as we are with doubts and fears and impure thoughts, God still wants us to take the bread and drink the wine, in order that we may be reminded again and again that his body was broken *for us,* that his blood was shed *for us.*

We may persist in sinning, but here we are brought face to face with him who conquered sin; it has no more dominion over him. Thus we also meet as potential saints, for his victory can be shared by us.

Take this sacrament today, believing that Christ is faithful, believing that Christ can transform. And the living presence of the strong Son of God will be to you better than light and safer than the known way.

No Common Contact

THE real trouble with the worship of the man who says he can find God easier on a lake shore, before a quiet sunset, is that it is too antiseptic to please Almighty God. It has no common contact with the misery of the world. There are no traces in it of the tears and stains of human life. It lifts no imploring hand upward, sweaty with the pain of our common heritage as men. It is a bloodless worship that blots out Christ upon his cross.

You get the kind of worship that throbs and pulses with the agelong cry of human beings for salvation only when you are willing to rub shoulders in a church with the kind of men you, as a Christian, have to love but, as a human being, you may not like.—*From* Our Christian Vocation, *by John Heuss (Greenwich: The Seabury Press, 1955). Used by permission of the publisher.*

The Descent into Hell

By William S. Hill

EVERYONE has moments when he feels depressed, debilitated, defeated; there are times when even the most sanguine person is "down in the dumps"; on occasion the existence of an individual becomes a living hell. But even in moments of defeat and discouragement, even in hell itself, it is possible to find the door to a new quality of life.

Some years ago David Peskin went through hell —three long months of it in a Marine hospital recovering from bullet wounds received on Okinawa. But it was while in hell, on his hospital cot, that he got a vision of what to do with his life. For a long time he had been a competent photographer taking black and white shots exclusively; but while convalescing he decided to concentrate on color photography of high-speed action, and while still in the hospital he began his study of the theory of color and of its application to camera work. Today, if anyone wants color action photos of the highest quality—shots of the baseball World Series, for example—he calls on David Peskin, the man who on his own admission carved out his future in hell.

Religion is aware of the defeats and disabilities that overtake men and women; it knows that from time to time people live in what amounts to hell on earth; but it affirms that in hell itself it is possible to find the very path that leads to heaven. This is one spiritual meaning which can be given the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell."

I

"I believe in Jesus Christ . . . [who] descended into hell." There is a fascinating story behind this phrase and its insertion in the creed.

In the early days of the church there was a Christian cult whose members maintained that Jesus never really died. His death, they said, was an illusion; he was in a coma when his body was taken down from the cross, and he was revived by the spices and ointments the women brought to the tomb. But the early church fathers would have none of this idea. "Not so!" they said. "His death was no illusion; Jesus really died—so much so that his soul went to the place of departed spirits. I short, we firmly believe "He descended into hell

Along with their desire to assert that Jesu really died, the early church fathers had anothe reason for saying that he went down into hel They also wanted to affirm the depths of hi humiliation. "Out of his profound love for mar kind," they said, "Christ not only suffered physica torment and death, but his very spirit went dow into the dismal abyss of the nether regions. Ther were no limits to the humiliation he was willin to undergo for the sake of humanity; he descende into hell."

This viewpoint is expressed in a legend foun in a book written perhaps a century after th death of Jesus. According to this legend, onc Jesus died on the cross, his soul spent the nex three days in hell preaching and teaching wit such success that he was able to convert some o the inhabitants and to lead them out of hell u into heaven. In other words, between Good Frida and Easter, Christ ministered to the souls wh had been consigned to perdition, and by this min istry was able to redeem some, opening up t them an existence of blessedness and joy.

That, in brief, is the background of what is perhaps the strangest phrase in the creed. The church fathers wanted to assert as clearly as they could that Christ really died, that he was willing to endure the lowest depths of humiliation t serve mankind, and that he was ready to minister even to those who appeared to be lost souls. And all this was summed up in the phrase, "He descended into hell."

II

The phrase "he descended into hell" has some important implications for human life; and the first is that no one can sink so low that he is unsalvageable, irredeemable or beyond hope.

In his earthly life, Jesus had associated with publicans, outcasts and people of unsavory reputation; he had chosen his disciples from among men who could make no claims to virtue; and of himself he said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." No wonder the legend arose that after his death he descended into hell to do what he could for the poor souls there!

This basic Christian idea—that no one can sink too deep to be brought to the surface and salvaged

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WILLIAM S. HILL, rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, is editor of the monthly publication of the Pittsburgh diocese, a responsibility carried over from his years as rector in Uniontown.

s a thought that has been graphically demonated by the Salvation Army. "A man may be vn," as General Booth put it, "but he's never ." And this is why the Salvation Army has ne into slums, into prisons, into disreputable es; this is why it has erected sanatoria for alcoics, homes for unmarried mothers and recreanal centers for the underprivileged. All this has n done in the name of Christ who descended o hell.

What does this mean to us personally? It means at however pitifully we have failed morally, wever debilitated we have become spiritually, wever disgraced we have become socially, life still salvageable. None of us has fallen so low at he is beneath redemption. We know this beuse of Christ who descended into hell.

III

This phrase also has the value of reminding us at hell is not a place of aimless torture, but ther of purification and of growth. It is in hell, ys *Theologia Germanica,* a devotional manual itten some 500 years ago, that the human soul prepared to enter heaven.

I honestly don't know where we get the idea of ll-fire used as an instrument of torture. The ncient Israelites did not use fire for torture; if ey wanted to torture a man, they stoned him. the Bible we discover that fire was used to rify things, to cleanse them of their imperfecons, to prepare them for their highest and blest uses. Hell-fire, therefore, can be a symbol a growth process—a process whereby the imrities, the blemishes and the imperfections of aracter are purged for the sake of a newer and gher development of the personality.

Surely it was a living hell—the hell of a guilty nscience — which brought out the religious enius of Moses. In his youth, you will remember, loses killed a man, and had to flee the country. nd it was while in the wilderness, struggling ith his conscience, that he caught his first vision f God and of his own destiny. His own particular ell, you see, provided him with the opportunity r growth. Or take an example closer to home: woman who made a wreck of her first marriage nd then astonished her friends by the success of er second. To one who commented on this she aid, "I ought to understand how to live in heaven; ou see, I've known what it is to live in hell!"

What does this mean to us personally? It means he hell we are going through is helping us grow nd develop in character; it is preparing us to ve in heaven. It is peeling off our hard layers; t is heightening our sensitiveness; it is making s compassionate; in short, it is changing us into ersons worthy to enter heaven. Indeed, as the nknown ancient writer of *Theologia Sermonica* ut it, Christ himself could ascend into heaven nly because he first descended into hell.

IV

There is a further message contained in the hrase, which is that however deeply we go down into hell, God is there. Everyone is familiar with the lines from the Psalm 139:

> Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
> Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
> If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
> If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
> If I take the wings of the morning
> and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
> even there thy hand shall lead me,
> and thy right hand shall hold me.

The affirmation that Christ descended into hell is an affirmation that God is there, too.

Dr. George Matheson had been blind since his eighteenth year, and when he asked a certain young woman to marry him she refused on the ground that his blindness would be too great a burden for her to share. Matheson's gloom and mental distress knew no bounds; in his soul he struggled to keep from surrendering to despair. The only thing that sustained him was his religious faith, for even in his private hell of loneliness and disconsolation, he found God there. Indeed, soon after his great disappointment he wrote the lines that have since become familiar:

> O love that will not let me go,
> I rest my weary soul in Thee!

What does this mean to us personally? It means that when my child goes into the operating room, Thou art there. When my business folds up and the work of a lifetime seems to be in vain, Thou art there also. When the things I have done prey on my conscience, when a telegram bringing crushing news arrives, when my whole life seems to be on shifting sand—when, in short, I am in hell—even there also shalt Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand hold me. There, in its full depth, is the true meaning of the phrase "He descended into hell."

V

Let us return to the legend that tells of Christ's preaching to the souls in hell. According to this story, only *some* of those down there were redeemed and granted an entrance into heaven. Was it because Christ loved only a few? No, he loved them all. Did he preach only to a few, or could only certain ones hear him? No, he preached to all, and everyone could hear his message. Why, then, were not all the souls redeemed? Ah, here we come to the cutting edge of the legend: Because some didn't want to be. Like some living today, there were those who preferred to keep their own values, their own standards, their own way of doing things, and above all, their own pride, even if to retain them meant staying in hell.

The Apostles' Creed, however, does not tell us about the unredeemed, but about Christ. And by affirming his descent into hell, it reminds us first that no one can sink so low that he is beyond hope. It reminds us secondly that our own private hell can be an opportunity for growth and development, preparing us for heaven. And it reminds us lastly that into however deep an abyss we plunge, God is there.

Where to Draw the Line

By Richard A. Wolff

SEVERAL months ago I had a revealing conversation with a man who operated a small business. Knowing that he had been a salesman and seeing that the signs advertising his particular line of equipment had been removed, I asked him why he was no longer on the road and had gone to work for someone else. "Well," he said, "I enjoyed selling but the company put pressure on me to misrepresent the product. Now it is all right to be a good salesman, but when a man has to be dishonest in order to earn a living, it is time to draw the line."

It is time to draw the line! Is not one of the basic problems for all of us that of knowing where to draw the line? The business man is interested in good customer relations and in doing all he can for his customers; but when customers take advantage of him and expect him to go more than halfway, then the business man says it is time to draw the line. The school teacher is interested in keeping good rapport with her pupils and in being friendly with them; but when her friendliness makes it difficult to enforce discipline, when pupils go too far, then it is time to draw the line. Statesmen are interested in world peace and in conciliation toward other nations; but when leaders of other nations violate human rights and go back on agreements, then it is time to draw the line.

Balance Between Opposites

This whole matter of Christian living is essentially one of knowing where to draw the line. We have often assumed that being a Christian is simply a matter of accepting a set of beliefs and moral standards and of holding to them regardless of the situation. Christian living is not that easy. It is a matter of knowing when and how to apply our principles, as well. It is a matter of knowing how to avoid extremes without compromise. A virtue carried to extremes may become another vice. The Christian always places himself in balance between two opposites. Learning how to make the proper adjustment between two opposites, knowing where a virtue leaves off and a vice begins, knowing where to draw the line—that is the essence of Christian living.

God knows where to draw the line. As St. Paul has suggested (Romans 11:22), "Note then the kindness and the severity of God." God is not all kind and not all severe. He is both kind and just. He makes a happy balance between these two opposites. He knows where to draw the line between love and justice.

Humility and Weakness

Let us look then at some areas of our religious living and see how this truth applies. In the first place, we need to learn where to draw the line between humility and weakness. Humility has long been recognized as one of the cardinal virtues of the Christian faith. In a time that exalts arrogance and egotism, how important it is that we rediscover this great virtue. Jesus taught us to be unselfish and teachable. Humility means getting the "I" and the ego out of the way and letting God in. For the "I" is a stumbling block in our approach to God. Humility is the opposite of egotism. It means allowing others to praise us rather than seeking our own praise. Humility is not conceited and boastful. Some while ago the leaders in one of our public schools in New Jersey decided to make a study of the social attitudes of their pupils. They circulated a questionnaire in which pupils were to write in the answers. One of the questions was this, "Who in your class boasts the least about himself?" One 12-year-old girl wrote in the answer, "I do."

On the other hand, humility can be carried to extremes; and when it makes a person crawl or become weak, it is time to draw the line. Then it is time for a person to take just pride in his accomplishments,—just pride in what God has done with him and through him. Humility that lacks righteous anger and confidence has become a vice. The Christian ought always to be proud in the right sense of the word. Man ought to take holy pride in his sonship of God. Do you know where to draw the line between humility and weakness?

Tact and Insincerity

In the second place, the Christian needs to learn where to draw the line between tact and insincerity. We all have within us a basic hunger to be liked by our fellow men. It is a natural hunger

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RICHARD A. WOLFF, pastor of Central Congregational Church in Lynn, Massachusetts, since November 1950, has served two years as president of the Greater Lynn Council of Churches and is now chairman of its committee on expansion. He is also a member of the education for union committee of the Massachusetts conference of his denomination. His prime interest, however, is in preaching and pastoral counciling.

d has its proper place in our lives. It is one of e fundamental reasons why we find it necessary be tactful. We do not want to offend others lest ey dislike us. Sometimes our desire to be tactful ads to flattery and insincerity. If so, it is time draw the line. In the end our extreme tact may ake us unpopular with the very people whom we pe to please. They have discovered it to be what really is, insincerity. How true it is that young ople find it necessary to be liked by the group which they are a part, so much so that when ey get into a crowd the individual conscience is st in the conscience of the crowd. The desire to a good fellow and to go along with the crowd as led many a young person to compromise his nvictions and to lose his moral identity. When hat happens, it is time to draw the line. Christians eed to learn to speak the truth in love, to stand y their moral principles in spite of the mob, to emain morally independent.

Tolerance and Indifference

Again, Christians need to learn to know where o draw the line between tolerance and indifference. Tolerance is a rather popular virtue just ow. It is popular to be broad-minded. It is popular to seem to be able to get along with everybody, o say, "One man's religion is as good as another's." Now tolerance is a Christian virtue, but when it means watering down one's own convictions or, even worse, not knowing what one's convictions are, then tolerance has become indifference and it is time to draw the line. Christian tolerance is a virtue that is easily misunderstood. As you know, for several years we have had joint Thanksgiving services with our Jewish friends at Temple Beth El. These have been rewarding services rich in fellowship and inspiration. Yet I was approached by one individual who asked me the question, "How can we in all sincerity have joint services with the Jews? We accept Jesus Christ as Lord and the Jews do not." The question indicates that tolerance is often misunderstood. We can have fraternal relations with those who differ from us without seeking to become like them or without asking them to become like us. We know what their convictions are and we know what our convictions are. We allow them the right to hold their convictions as we expect the right to hold ours. We are not asking them to accept our convictions nor do they ask us to accept theirs. We are simply saying that we have mutual respect for each other and that we can walk side by side in the spirit of fellowship and brotherhood.

In his book *The Lion and the Lamb,* Dr. Gerald Kennedy has very pointedly called our attention to Isaiah 11:6, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." He reminds us that we often miss the important point of this prophecy. The prophet did not say that the wolf would become like the lamb or the lamb like the wolf. He suggested that each is to maintain its own nature and learn to dwell and walk together under the leadership and guidance of the spirit of God. That is real tolerance based on conviction. But when tolerance becomes superficial so that we lose sight of our own convictions and halfheartedly try to accept the convictions of another, tolerance has turned to indifference and it is time to draw the line.

Forgiveness and Moral Weakness

Christians need to learn where to draw the line between humility and weakness, between tact and insincerity, between tolerance and indifference and, in the fourth place, between forgiveness and moral weakness. Jesus advocated that we forgive seventy times seven, but always in the forgiveness of Jesus there was one main thought uppermost in his mind: the redemption of the sinner, the restoring of a right relationship between the sinner and the sinned-against, between the sinner and God. He forgave, always in the hope that the sinner would become penitent and find his way back to harmony with God and man. Jesus knew how to be gentle and conciliatory, but when this did not bring about the desired change of heart, he knew where to draw the line. He could also be severe and just. Jesus forgave the woman at the well but to the money-changers in the temple who had desecrated God's house and broken his sacred laws, he poured out his righteous indignation, voicing the judgment of God. "Note then the kindness and the severity of God." It is required of the Christian that he be gentle and forgiving but when forgiveness leads to moral compromise and destroys the sense of Christian justice it is time to draw the line. We can forgive the wrongdoer but not condone the wrong done. The love of God is a combination of justice and kindness. "You have no tenderness; you have only justice and therefore you are unjust," says Doestoevsky. "Tenderness is total love, whereas justice is only part of love though it believes itself mistakenly to be the whole."

Being a Christian, then, is knowing where to draw the line, knowing how to find the right balance between virtues and vices. Every day we must make decisions in applying our Christian beliefs. This requires insight and courage. May God grant us the wisdom and the strength that we may draw the line in the right places!

First Things First

ANY man going ahead is in danger, if he has strong ambition without strong principles. Always there is a temptation not to let moral scruples handicap anything that brings success. Macbeth is evil, not in the ambition, but in the willingness to pay too great a price. He does not know how to put first things first. For tangibles excellent in themselves he sacrifices intangibles wherein all the values of life ultimately reside.—*Ernest Marshall Howse,* Spiritual Values in Shakespeare *(Nashville: Abingdon, 1955). Used by permission.*

KATYDID, KATYDIDN'T

A Sermon for Children by Margaret K. Henrichsen

North Sullivan, Maine

IT was a hot summer day. Bobby and Betty had been playing happily in the yard when the trouble started. Betty was saying in a too-loud voice, "You did too," and Bobby was whining, "No I didn't."

Then Betty stamped her foot and said, "Yes you did. I saw you."

Bobby said, "I did not either, so—."

Then Betty did a terrible thing. She slapped her little brother hard, and stamped her foot and said, "Yes you did, and I am going to tell Mother."

Bobby began to cry, and both the children went into the house. Betty was just as cross and angry as she could be, and her little brother was wailing in a loud voice that brought Mother running to the door.

"O children," she said in a disappointed voice, "what's the matter now? You were playing so nicely. What happened?"

Betty told her, "Mother, Bobby took a cookie without asking. He did. I saw him. Then he lied and said he didn't, and I told him I saw him and he said he didn't."

Mother turned to Bobby who was still crying softly. He said, "She slapped me. Sister slapped me hard."

"Well I guess you had better take your things off and stay in now," Mother told them. "It's almost supper time. Betty, you go up to your room until I call you."

"But Mother," Betty argued, "it was Bobby who took the cookie. I didn't do anything."

Then Mother said in her I-mean-it voice, "You slapped your little brother. March right upstairs this minute."

So Betty had to go.

When they were alone, Mother talked to Bobby about the cookie and about telling the truth. (He was really very little.) After that he stayed in the kitchen and helped her get supper.

After supper everybody went out on the porch for a little while. It was getting dark. Off across the field Bobby heard a funny noise. "What's that?" he asked.

Daddy answered, "That's a katydid."

Bobby asked, "What's a katydid?"

Daddy answered, "Oh, it's a kind of grasshopper."

"Listen a moment," Mother said. "You'll hear it say 'Katydid!' "

Sure enough, they heard the little buzzy noise: "Katydid, katydid." When they heard another answering, "Katydidn't, katydidn't," Betty began to giggle. "Mother," she said, "they're squabbling, just like Bobby and I this afternoon."

"Why, so they are!" Mother told her. "They are just grasshoppers, so I guess they will keep right on arguing. Children and grownups understand that it isn't half so important to know who is right as it is to be kind and loving. Just being right, without being loving, makes being right almost wrong."

Betty only half heard. She was listening to the little voices off in the meadow saying "Katydid," "She didn't." But on the way upstairs Betty put her arm around her little brother and kissed him. In a few minutes she was in her bed, remembering that being right could be almost wrong unless you could be friends. And she was so very, very glad that she was a real little girl and not a grasshopper.

Pastoral Prayer

By Herbert W. Hahn

First Methodist, Ravena, New York

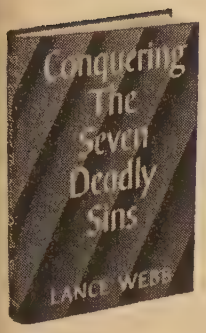
ETERNAL God, high over all, Judge of all men and Ruler of the Universe, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord and seek Thy divine guidance. Thou hast been our help in ages past and art our hope for years to come. Give us grace, we beseech Thee, to learn of Thee, to walk by Thy counsel and to do the things that are pleasing in Thy sight.

We beseech Thee to guide our nation and pray especially for the President and his advisers; for the members of his cabinet, the senate and the house of representatives; and for all in positions of responsibility and places of leadership. Grant unto them wisdom, clear insight, sound judgment, sincere aims and uprightness of heart; that they may fulfill the duties of their office and nobly accomplish the task that is before them.

We pray for all the people of this nation. May they turn to Thee, seek Thy face and walk in uprightness before Thee. Teach us Thy commandments and laws, and make Thy ways known upon the earth. Give us grace to love Thee with heart, soul, mind and strength; and our neighbor for Thy sake; that we and all mankind may live together as friends and good neighbors.

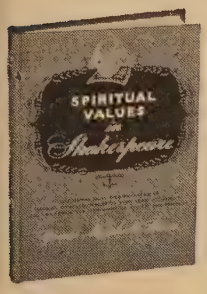
May the day be not far distant when Thy name shall be reverenced in all the earth; when men and nations everywhere will bow in humble submission to Thy sovereign rule, will work together with Thee and with one another to establish righteousness, justice, peace, brotherhood and good will, and thus help to build a more perfect world in which Thy Kingdom may come and Thy will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

BOOKS FOR SUMMER READING AND STUDY



CONQUERING THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

By Lance Webb. This hard-hitting book based on solid Christian doctrine analyzes Sin in its seven deadly forms—*anger, dejection, gluttony, avarice, envy, pride, lust*—as the basis of man's everyday fears and frustrations. Dr. Webb discusses the nature, history, and particular causes of each sin and shows how it can be—and has been—overcome *only by the power of the Holy Spirit.* A book to help the minister and those he counsels to become the finer persons they were meant to be. **$3**



SPIRITUAL VALUES IN SHAKESPEARE

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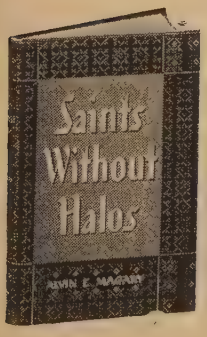

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Come Let Us Worship

By M. F. Allen, J

Hallmarks of Worship

WORSHIP is "a man listening through a tornado for the still small voice." It is "a candle in the act of being kindled." It can be described as "a hungry heart seeking for love." And it can be understood in terms of a "soul standing in awe before the mystery of the universe." These words from the pen of Dwight Bradley* represent an attempt to define an enigma which Christians generally recognize to be the most meaningful and dramatic of all experiences. It seems that most such attempts as this one are foredoomed to failure because, though worship may be the most dramatic of all experiences, it is nevertheless one of the most enigmatic. It is an experience most difficult to reduce to terms adequately describing its high meaning. But by such word pictures as these Mr. Bradley translates this enigma into drama clearly related to the common life. In doing this he follows in the train of One who taught in parables which were illuminating, concrete representations of abstract reality.

Still, Small Voice

Worship is "a man listening through a tornado for the still, small voice." Well does that phrase describe the modern scene! It takes no stretch of the imagination to share the feeling that was Wordsworth's when he said, "The World is too much with us; Getting and spending we lay waste our powers." A question in the minds of many who sense the lack of The Meaningful in their lives is, "How hear God in the marketplace?" We live in a world in which temptation to sin, the contagion of sickness and the despair of frustration are ever present. And at times we are prone to accept the counsel of defeatism and arrive at the conclusion that to hear God in the marketplace is desperately difficult if not impossible. Then we either become hedonists in our view of the true ends of life, or we somehow manage to reserve a small corner of our experience for formal religions functions. And a little religion is often worse than none at all!

But, the greater the force of the tornado, the more penetrating is the "still, small voice." This is demonstrably true in the lives of those whom the desperation and feverishness life at its worst have made all t more aware of their need for t quietness and confidence of life at i best. Perhaps God has placed us in world that could become such an e vironment as our world is now in ord that the obvious disharmony of exi tence apart from him might make the more conscious of our need for h quieting and reassuring presenc Worship *is* "a man listening through tornado for a still, small voice"—e pecially in these our years.

A Candle Kindled

Worship is also "a candle in th act of being kindled." The worshipe of course, is the candle: there is p tentiality within him for being a lig which reveals ugliness, as well a beauty, for what it is; which make clearer to others the way to righteous ness, and to God; which focuses it power on darkness, the enemy ove which it always has power in moment of direct confrontation. This candl the worshiper, may be placed in th most beautiful of settings, or in th ugliest. The setting may be a cathedra which has been erected as a scene fo the burning of the candle, or it may b a woods, inspiring thoughts of wonde and quietness. On the other hand it may be a place of degrading squalor or one of the many present haunts o trenchant evil. The scene may be any place, for man's environment canno deny, no more than it can guarantee the experience of worship.

But, however ornate or plain the candle, whatever the scene, the act is incomplete until the candle is lit Before there can be light, there has to be a Lighter! Worship is the act of vital contact with that Lighter With the presence of God everywhere and at all times realizable in the world it is a source for amazement that there are so many unlit candles. How few share the burning heart which was a part of the experience on the Emmaus road of those two early followers of

*Albert W. Palmer, *Aids to Worship* (New York: Macmillan, 1940).

M. F. ALLEN, Jr., is director of adult work for the Board of Publication and Christian Education of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. He took this position at the first of the year after serving as pastor of First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas.

Christ who were men in sorrow despair—unlit candles—until the r-living Christ made them know his sence and shared his light with m! Worship is the offering of an mpleteness to the one who is *the* plement to our existence. Worship a "candle in the act of being dled."

A Heart Seeking

t is also "a hungry heart seeking love." The fact of a hungry heart a world of almost two and one-half ions is itself an enigma. Why uld there be loneliness at all when many share the same experiences l know the same frustrations? But re is loneliness, and that loneliness a fact which mere argument as to needlessness cannot dislodge. There essential lack of vital companion- p, which is loneliness, even in homes ose members necessarily and natur- y share many of life's most intimate periences. Why? The psychologists t at part of the answer when they int out phenomena which make evi- nt the lack of satisfactory adjust- nt to environment. Self-centered- ss is often an all-too-significant fac- in the life of a home, and that ality tends toward loneliness in the e of the self-centered one as well as the life of the one who desires to are life with him.

But, in the experiences even of those ho are the "best adjusted," there is vague, indefinable longing for Some- ing, or Someone, who may not be present reality in their lives. What an has not shared in his highest oments the aloneness which Augus- ne described in the words, "Thou st made us for Thyself, and our arts are restless, until we find rest Thee"? A most significant testi- ony to the actuality of God is the uth that so many have fulfilled their ghest selfhood only as they have ound in God the One Adequate An- ver to their aloneness. And if God love, then it is love for which the unger in our heart seeks. It is love, finite love, which satisfies yearning an. Worship is the act of seeking nd sharing that love; worship is "a ungry heart seeking for love."

The Soul in Awe

Finally, worship is "the soul stand- ig in awe before the mystery of the niverse." All great and majestic henomena fill the sensitive and be- olding person with a feeling of awe nd humility: with a feeling of awe, s concerns the phenomenon's power o thrill, and with a feeling of humili- y, as concerns the inevitable subjec- ive reaction to the feeling of awe tself.

Only that man who has known God s he is can know himself as he really s. Only that person who has ex- perienced the sense of wonder and wfulness which accompanies an un- derstanding of the majesty and holi- ness of God can know his own true tature. Man apart from God is neither as small nor as large as the nonreligionist thinks himself, or others, to be. He is not as small: for, granted the possibility of a personal relationship with God, there is an innate dignity which every human being, regardless of his race or nation or economic status, shares. The possibility of communion with the Infinite signifies also the possibility of sharing the infinite. He is not as large: for man is not complete within himself. He does not have the understanding or perception to discover the solutions to problems central to his existence. He is *not* capable of achieving Utopia under his own steam: witness the two recent World Wars and the present state of the world. Man is capable of achieving the best only as he maintains vital contact with The Best.

There is within the mind of man the insatiable desire to explore the mysteries of the universe. This desire is natural and is beneficent in the extent to which man uses for good the knowledge which his explorations turn up. But each new identified phenomenon reveals countless others whose existence had not even been suspected before. There is ever awe, because there is ever incomprehensible grandeur. The awe need not preclude the exploring. But neither can the exploring remove the awe. Worship is man's awe as he senses the majesty and wonder of the physical and spiritual universe, which cannot but be revelatory of the majesty and wonder of its Creator. And so worship is "the soul standing in awe before the mystery of the universe." And what is incomprehensible may be related to what we know of Him. Thus does assurance accompany awe, for God is love.

And so this is worship. By such experiences can the abstract become concrete. In these ways can the dramatic become less enigmatic. Thus can God come to be known in our experience as one who indeed is "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

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For Summer Study

SPIRITUAL VALUES IN SHAKESPEARE. By **Ernest Marshall Howse.** Abingdon, $2.50. Time was when most preachers knew their Shakespeare as well as their Scriptures. There was good reason for it, too. No one outside the Bible has had quite so discerning an eye for the whole human scene as did Shakespeare, and few have equalled him for utterance. He could not know, as did the writers involved in revelation, how unfathomable is the trouble behind all our troubles. He could not know, as they did, the promise too good to be true. But he saw our agonies and our aspirations and set them down so we recognize ourselves in them. No wonder the pulpit used the playwright when setting the stage for proclamation of the gospel. Shakespeare knew all that about us which makes the Good News good.

For those who had forgotten, this new book is a refresher course in that. A look at the chapter titles gives the outline—*Hamlet:* The Tragedy of Indecision; *Othello:* The Tragedy of Jealousy; *MacBeth:* The Tragedy of Ambition; *King Lear:* The Tragedy of Ingratitude; *Richard the Third:* The Tragedy of Bad Intention; *Julius Caesar:* The Tragedy of Good Intention; *The Merchant of Venice:* The Tragedy of Inhumanity; *The Tempest:* The Tragedy of Life.

More learned critics may cavil at few of the generalizations, all of us in the campus will get righteously ruffled at the use of "academic" as a term of opprobrium (surely the soil of Howse's reflections is academic, and many for whom he writes will be academicians)—but all that is beside the point. Here is a useful, careful thought, richly developed study which will add depth to any man's learning and breadth to any minister's preaching.

The foreword mentions other similar studies of contemporary plays. May they soon be published. Some living playwrights have special vision to and though their language may lack classic grandeur, it sometimes breaks through the homiletical spell we weave too often in our sermons—stabs through in a way that older languages and thought forms never, never do.

PORTRAIT OF CALVIN. By **T. H. Parker.** Westminster, $2.00. For long John Calvin was a bogey to non-Calvinists, and an embarrassment to his own. The man himself, as he emerged in his myth, was so rigid, so long-nosed, so dour and dangerous, and his theology as it was sieved through the centuries was so stiff, so wordy and literalistic—who in the 20th century could make anything of either?

Well, time and new research have made much of both. Time, by showing us a world which much that had been forbidding in Calvin's theology seemed not to fit best. New research, by discovering an existentialist, christocentric cast to Calvin's thought that has been overlooked all along. The same research is showing us again the humanity of the real man, penetrating the malignant myth. The trouble is that all the results of this new Calvin study have been, till now, confined to the thick books and the thin monographs of the scholars. Many churchmen who have known that something was going on, and who have wanted to get behind the enigma, just haven't had the materials at hand.

Mr. Parker's little book (124 pages) makes a good start toward bringing nonspecialists up-to-date. In a bright and flowing style, and taking nothing for granted, he tells the story of the life, presents the real personality, and

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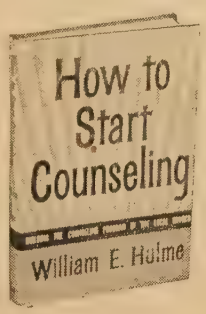

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prets the theology. The biograph- hapters detailing Calvin's domes- ife and his civic embroilments specially illuminating and recon- tive. Take this, for instance: "It range to realize that for most of ife Calvin's house was full of g children . . . The *Institutes* was written in an ivory tower, but ast the background of teething oles."

he chapter on the theology is not uccessful. Partly, this is because is commendable effort to commend in's theology, Mr. Parker settles wo particularly unattractive and particularly penetrating images recur in Calvin's writing (though often enough to be lifted to such ience): the Labyrinth and the olmaster. They do not make an uate frame on which to arrange teaching, and they lend themselves e to perpetuating than to puncturing the common caricature of Calvin. The other trouble with this chap- is T. H. L. Parker's obvious dis- ointment in J. Calvin for his not ing been K. Barth.

o this book is not the last word in ular Calvin studies, but it is bless- y aware of the new words that being spoken in the revival of Cal- scholarship. If along with the reshed version of the life and per- ality of Calvin so ably developed e, we could have a more penetrat- , flexible account of his theology, we ld speak more confidently of last rds. Meanwhile, for those who are eady in the know and who would mmunicate their appreciation, here the book to give to those who ask, What about this Calvin, anyway?"

T.A.G.

Pulpit Post

ny Other Comments?

SIR: Thanks for the softer grade paper on which the July issue was inted. I can read it without being oubled by the blinding glare. When e change was first made in the type paper, I was a bit disturbed. So any fine improvements had been ade that I hesitated to write in a itical spirit. I hope that you will ntinue to use the softer paper.

MARTIN J. PREHN.
Presbyterian,
Rolfe, Iowa.

ign and Symbol

SIR: I should like to clarify one ain point in Dr. Enslin's column on ne Hiroshima cross (May) since I am ne author of the Pulpit Paragraph March) in question. Apparently the ords "symbol" and "sign" do not ean the same thing to Dr. Enslin as ey do to me. Commenting on my tatement that the Hiroshima cross is symbol of God's eternal forgiveness, e reports difficulty in finding "clear evidence" of this in said cross. Symbols are not intended to give "clear evidence," but only to "point to" something. Webster defines "symbol" as "that which *suggests* something else." Many who saw the motion picture *More for Peace*, in which the Hiroshima cross played a central role, found much that suggested God's eternal forgiveness.

Dr. Enslin objects to the statement, "It [the Hiroshima cross] is a sign that we have forgiven Japan her sins, that she has forgiven us our sins, and that together we can start over anew." Such a claim, he intimates, takes in far too much territory and is not supported by the facts. Entirely true, if the sentence is taken literally. But symbolic language is not intended to be taken literally (the entire paragraph was written in the context of symbol). Webster's definition of "sign" is "a conventional symbol representing an *idea*." Only in a remoter sense does it refer to an accomplished fact.

When Pastor Tanimoto and the pilot of the Hiroshima bomb shook hands on a nationally televised program recently, they did not prove that reconciliation had come between Japan and the United States—not by any means. But to many this dramatic incident communicated an idea fraught with great possibility. It pointed to a new direction in which American foreign policy could go, not only with Japan but with other nations as well.

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Pulpit Patter

By Morton S. Ens

Hail, Thomas

LAST month I confessed to the horrid suspicion that among those characters in the New Testament who have been pilloried as "undesirables" there were several whom I should like to have known. Well up on that list is Thomas. We know very little about him. Like most of the Twelve, he is scarcely more than a name in a list, although actually, unlike several of his shadowy colleagues, he does appear in the Gospel pages a few times as something more than a mere name. But for most people, if my experience for the past 30 years in reading examinations designed to test knowledge of the contents of the New Testament is any criterion, the only fact remembered about Thomas is that he doubted. We dub him "Doubting Thomas" and write him off as a liability.

But is doubt so sorry a vice? Frankly, I do not think that it is. Instead, it is often something brave and strong, a quality without which there would never be any advance. Certainly, for one thinker of the past, whose impress has been heavy, and properly so, it was the solid basis for all knowledge, all confidence. Everything, he maintained, must be doubted if we are to discover anything beyond doubt. At first blush that thesis seemed to cause everything to succumb, and so his critics protested. But beneath what seemed illusion and dream there was found to be a solid rock of foundation, doubt itself. He who doubts cannot doubt the reality of his doubt. And since doubt is an act of thought, the thinker is guaranteed, and his triumphant outcry, "I think; therefore I am."

Nor is Descartes alone. The history of life in all its branches, it seems to me, attests this same solid fact of experience. It is only as we doubt and question that any advance is possible, any certainty achieved. Every discovery, be it of gadgets or thought, has been based on the doubt that what has been achieved is perfect, that it is final, that it cannot be improved.

We gladly accept this for things; but when it comes to the intangibles—to politics, to the social order, to religion—ah, that is another matter. In those realms we are not pioneers, pathfinders; we are radicals, communists, heretics.

Thus I am not inclined to gibe at Thomas, at least as he is portrayed in the old record. In fact, the very epithet "Doubting" appears to me instea distinct badge of merit. I fear—I fess it with no shame or embarr ment, for the years have but adde my certainty at that point—I that had I been in his sandals there in the yesteryears I should h shared his qualms.

But the fact too often overloo is that when this man from the N East Missouri, who was not incli docilely to accept and believe what to him but hearsay, did see, it was who confessed, "My Lord and God." To what extent we are look at an untouched negative, to what tent the resulting portrait has b touched up, appears to me of li moment. It has proved true to through the centuries.

It is the man who refuses to sea to test, to seek to discover why bushes burn without being consum who is the one we need to keep an on lest his "Hail, hail" turn "Crucify, crucify." For the man al to the moment, ready to revise views as new light comes and eager be forced to do so, the poet's word a near-perfect tribute: "There is m faith in honest doubt, believe me, th in half the creeds."

Pulpit Calendar

Aug. 7—10th Sunday after Pentecost.
Aug. 14—11th Sunday after Pentecost.
Aug. 21—12th Sunday after Pentecost.
Aug. 28—13th Sunday after Pentecost.
Sept. 4—Labor Sunday.
Sept. 11—Rally Day.
Sept. 18—16th Sunday after Pentecost.
Sept. 25—17th Sunday after Pentecost.
Sept. 25-Oct. 2—Christian Education Week.
Oct. 2—World Communion Sunday.
Oct. 9—Men and Missions Sunday.
Oct. 9-16—Churchmen's Week.
Oct. 16—Laymen's Sunday.
Oct. 23—World Order Sunday.
Oct. 30—Reformation Sunday.
World Temperance Sunday.

(Pulpit Calendar lists dates in the calendar of the Christian year and other observances of national or religious significance.)

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The Editor's Page

The Event of the Month

TEN years ago, on June 26, humanity's perennial hope to put an end to war gave birth to the United Nations at San Francisco. Its birthday was, fittingly, celebrated in that city. Naturally the speechmaking was under constraint to invest the organization with as much accomplishment as the facts and national self-interest might dictate. Our own representatives, the President and Secretary Dulles, spurred by Europe's taunt that its predecessor, the League of Nations, failed because the United States was not in it, were under the additional constraint of justifying our participation in the new organization. Unlike the League and the prematurely timed Kellogg-Briand Pact for the outlawry of war, the charter of the U.N. was born fully implemented with military sanctions against an aggressor. But this provision has proved to be unrealistic. The nations have returned to and developed outside the U.N. the immemorial system of military alliances of their "friends" against their potential enemies. The U.N. sponsors now emphasize its pacific functions — social, educational, humanitarian, economic, and its "forum for international debate." But these would shine more brightly if embodied in an organization completely dissociated from one whose major and fundamental aim it cannot itself achieve. An international forum dissociated from the illusory aim of ending war by making war would be something else than a sounding board for political propaganda. The utmost that a politically constituted world organization can do is to ratify and legalize the ending of war if and when it is achieved by developments outside its purview. The illusion that it can end war by military force only obscures and vitiates the pacific efforts to build a world community in which war would be unthinkable.

U.N. Celebrates Its Birthday

The Book of the Month

HARDNESS OF HEART. *By E. La B. Chernbonnier. Doubleday, $2.95.*

THIS is a book about sin, a subject that looms large in the contemporary revival of orthodoxy which includes a revival of the doctrine of "original sin." This doctrine the author rejects on biblical grounds. But he accepts as a fact the universality of sin and writes his book to provide an explanation of it which differs from that offered by Calvin and Luther, and Augustine before them. Their concern was to vindicate the majesty of God and his absolute initiative in all events of his creation. The Pauline idea of predestination was hardened into a dogma which controlled their thinking. This seemed to require the corollary of an inherited taint or essential corruption of human nature. But the author maintains that the universality of sin can be accounted for without making God responsible for it. An infant is born completely without sin. But he is born into a world shot through with hard-heartedness and idolatry, and grows up inevitably to share in this universal corporate evil of mankind. Thus by substituting sociological analysis for logic-chopping based upon a dogma, the Christian conception of sin and of salvation by grace and faith is preserved without making God responsible for evil. The author deals critically with classical and modern theories of human nature and maintains that the biblical conception is unique. But I missed any critique of the most tenable theory—that of Reinhold Niebuhr, who finds the locus of sin in the tension between man's finiteness and his freedom. I regret that the title of this book was not reserved for another volume by the author, for I missed any systematic exposition of sin as "hardness of heart."

A Thought for the Month

I HAVE just read another of a seemingly endless stream of pronouncements on Christian unity which seem to me designed to make the realization of a united church as difficult as possible. These writings evoke in my mind the image of a man trying to lift himself up to a platform by pulling at his bootstraps. He tugs and strains and grunts, but remains exactly where he was. The sort of writing to which I refer is characterized by pious agonizing arising from the ecclesiological depths in which the writer assumes the problem lies. But Christian unity, for Protestantism, is essentially an ecclesiastical, not an ecclesiological, undertaking. The One Church, when it emerges, will embrace our ecclesiological as well as our theological differences. The ecumenical movement confronts only one ecclesiological question: Are Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Disciples, Episcopalians and the rest, all equally accepted by Christ as members of his church? Except for Rome and Orthodoxy, and perhaps an Anglican minority, the answer to this question is a joyous affirmative. From that point on our thought should not be obfuscated by the pious assumption that unity must wait until we become better Christians. We ourselves are not better Christians than our fathers, and our children are not likely to be better Christians than their fathers. The present church is Christian enough, under God, to achieve its unity if the problem is projected in terms of ecclesiastical churchmanship.

Making Christian Unity As Hard as Possible

Charles Clayton Morrison

For the Record—

SOMETIME a real pulpit technician (that is, a skillful preacher who not only knows what to do homiletically but also that he does it and why he does it) will have to write a book on summer preaching. I'm not sure what should be in the book, but I'm perfectly sure that the problem of the subject is a real one. There is, or ought to be, a difference between fall-winter-spring sermons and summer sermons. The difference, it goes without saying, is not in the form or matter of our preaching. Every sermon is a service of the Word of God which we render his people, and the seasons do not alter that obligation. The biblical witness to Christ, the wisdom of the church on Christ—this is always the content of preaching. The physical, mental, moral, spiritual need of men—this is always the context of preaching.

None of that changes but, praise God, in most of the world the seasons do change, and with them, the congregations. Regulars leave and visitors arrive. This means that it is not quite safe to make the ordinary assumption that the whole congregation is familiar with the total theological substance behind each partial homiletical reflection. In the summer, no such familiarity can be taken for granted. The topics may well be more general. The development of each will not presuppose intimate acquaintance with the whole corpus of the preacher's conviction. As a matter of fact, presuppositions will be elaborated—which will make the sermon most significant for the transient who never heard this man before, will be helpful to the parishioners who always profit when the implicit is made explicit, and will not hurt the preacher who can always use the discipline of having to articulate what he takes for granted about what he believes. I should think that sermon series would be out, too.

It is not just the matter of summer preaching that will be altered by the season, however. The manner, too, will be different. The people out there in front of the pulpit are not of the same mind or spirit in these warm months. They are the same people, all right, but hotter, of shorter attention spans, with more motion or commotion to look forward to in active afternoons. The preacher who fails to make allowance for all this in his sermonizing is the preacher who will spend a long summer talking to himself—however many people are in the pews. That preacher is a poor shepherd who turns his whole flock into woolgatherers. Brightness, lightness and leaven galore are in order. Lightness, I said, and that is more than levity.

Sometime somebody will have to write a book on summer preaching. Wish he'd hurry, though. I'm preaching (at First Presbyterian) in New York City this summer and I feel a series coming on! T.A.G.

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